

## 2015 ANNUAL OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS

### ANTELOPE ALLOTMENT

Below is your Annual Operating Instructions (AOI) for the Antelope Allotment discussed at the spring meeting on January 27, 2015 and May 7, 2015. This AOI addresses Forest Service administered lands within the Antelope Allotment. Please review your Term Grazing Permit for grazing utilization, range improvement maintenance, and salting standards. Actual on-dates and off-dates are dependent on range readiness and when allowable use standards are met. The Forest Service may approve changes to the grazing rotation in consultation with the permittees to address range condition situations that may occur due to weather related circumstances. In the case of allotments running as unofficial associations, the elected president may sign for all permittees on an allotment with approval from the group.

Do not overnight or hold livestock in the Leadbelt Allotment, Lower Camp Creek Unit. Other methods will need to be used in getting your cattle on and off of the forest.

<u>Permittee</u>	<u>Permitted</u>	<u>Non-Use</u>	<u>Authorized</u>	<u>Season</u>
Mountain Springs Ranch LLC	249	59	190	07/01-10/15
Shane Rosenkrance	95	5	90	07/01-10/15
Evelyn Reese*	93	13	80	07/01-10/15
James Babcock	75	0	75	07/01-10/15
Rueben and Russell Babcock	311	0	311	07/01-10/15
David Keele	75	0	75	07/01-10/15
	898	77	821	07/01-10/15

<u>Grazing Unit Rotation</u>	<u>Estimated Days</u>	<u>Dates</u>
Burnt Hollow	16	7/1-7/16
Bear Creek	30	7/17-8/15
Smiley Meadows	18	8/16-9/2
Iron Bog	23	9/3-9/25
Dry Canyon	20	9/26-10/15

**These dates are an estimate and may vary  $\pm$  2-5 days under normal circumstances. Moves will be authorized by Rangeland Manager based on resource conditions.**

The NRCS SNOTEL sites across the Lost River Ranger District currently range from 64-90% of the Water Year average through the month of March. The Upper Big Lost River ranges from 70-80% of average and the Bear Canyon and Smiley Mountain SNOTEL sites both show 71% and 70% of average respectively. All indications show that cumulative drought impacts could persist or worsen this year. If this occurs the Forest Service expects that cattle may need to be moved more quickly through units and removed prior to the scheduled off date. Forage production is dependent on growing season (April through September) temperatures and precipitation. Even when drought conditions subside there is a lag time for plants to physically recover from the stress of the drought.

Modifications to the grazing unit rotation and estimated days of use must be requested by the permittee in advance and approved by the Forest Service. The Forest Service may initiate modifications in consultation with the permittees when changes to scheduled use are needed due to unexpected deficiencies in range conditions such as but not limited to: predatory issues, forage production, soil

moisture, precipitation, insect damage, fire, hail, plant growth/recovery during drought condition. If a permittee plans to run fewer or more cattle than scheduled, they need to contact the Forest Service and get approval prior to turning out onto the allotment and pay the grazing bill according to authorized use.

**Non-Compliance Remedy:** During the 2013 grazing season, there were consistent failures to comply with the required actions stated in the 2013 AOI. **The following actions are required again during the 2015 grazing season to remedy the non-compliance:**

1. All livestock are to be kept in the scheduled pasture according to the AOI or direction from myself or a rangeland management specialist as adjustments are made throughout the season.
2. End of season indicators are not exceeded.

**Failure to comply with these actions within the prescribed time frames may result in the initiation of permit suspension or cancellation procedures.**

During our meeting on January 9, 2014 the permittees agreed that the following changes should result in better management and achieving compliance: 1) hiring an additional rider for at least a portion of the grazing season on the Forest, 2) implement better communication and coordination with the range rider on what needs accomplished when permittees assist the range rider, 3) ensure better fence maintenance to decrease the likelihood of cattle drifting between units. In addition, the permittees and the Forest Service will look at the potential of a short drift fence to create a barrier for livestock to move from Iron Bog into Marcroft Canyon.

Many of the agreed to terms were carried out during the 2014 grazing season which improved management for the grazing season. Permittees should continue to implement better communication, have additional riders on the allotments and maintain improvements to standard. Permittees need to ensure that large groups of cattle do not drift to surrounding units, and when cattle are found outside of scheduled units they should promptly move cattle back to scheduled units.

**Allowable Use:** A 4-inch stubble height on hydric sedges & grasses will be used as an end of season annual indicator of utilization along the greenline of riparian areas across the allotment. A patchy or uneven use pattern along the greenline will usually result in stubble height annual indicator being met. While adequate regrowth may occur under average growing season conditions, the opposite may be true during below average conditions. Special attention should be given to drier weather conditions. A stubble height trigger above 4 inches is recommended in drier conditions to plan cattle moves as regrowth is limited under these conditions.

Riparian areas with greenlines dominated by Kentucky bluegrass and tufted hairgrass should also receive special attention to achieve end of season stubble height. Greenlines dominated by these plants have less bank stability than greenlines dominated by deep-rooted plants and are possibly in a lower state of ecological condition. These sites should be managed to increase the amount of stable hydric sedges, grasses, and shrubs where appropriate.

There is not an appropriate site to measure riparian stubble height on the Iron Bog unit, therefore upland utilization is used as an annual measure of use. Woody browse use on riparian shrubs will not exceed 50% of new leader growth and upland forage utilization will not exceed 50% across the allotment.

The drier mesic meadows adjacent to streams and springs should be watched to ensure that use levels are not exceeded. These meadows are of concern across the district and more focus is going to be put on use levels in these areas. While all adjacent meadows should be considered, the drier meadows have

less chance of regrowth and therefore are of highest concern. The upland annual use level of 50% should be used to manage the dry meadows and your rangeland management specialist will work with you to determine when a desired use level has been met, so that everyone understands what the meadows should look like after livestock use.

Other factors should also be considered for planning cattle moves between units. These include prevention of stream bank trampling, increase in rate of stubble height removal, changes in livestock behavior, changes in grazing preference from grasses and grass-like plants to young willows and other shrubs, large groups of cattle congregating in fence corners, at gates, or in riparian areas for long periods of time.

**Designated Monitoring Areas (DMA's):** DMA's are used to monitor representative riparian areas within a grazing unit which establishes a record of utilization and trend. The information from the DMA is also used to plan cattle moves, determine if end of season indicators are met, and to evaluate whether current management is effective or needs to be modified. Permittee monitoring, documentation and photos are encouraged before entering and when leaving each unit.

**Cleaning Grazing Units:** Livestock need to begin moving from a unit prior to the stubble height indicator being met to ensure allowable use levels are achieved. This is especially important during drought conditions. Permittees should be prepared to assist range riders in checking that the unit cleaned stays clean. Range riders should keep permittees informed of problems cleaning grazed units. Bulls should be kept with the main herd or removed from the allotment when they disrupt herd management. Frequent back-riding indicates there is a herd management problem. It is also the permittee's responsibility to correct problems caused by drift from other units.

The Dry Canyon Unit should receive additional attention prior to cattle entering the Unit and after cattle have been moved from the Unit to ensure that use is not occurring outside of the planned schedule. This was of particular concern in 2013 when using the same rotation.

The left fork of Dry Canyon above the drift fence had very light use in 2014 where other portions of the unit had moderate to high use. It is recommended that the permittees better utilize this unit to alleviate the higher use in other locations within the unit.

**Fence & Water Improvements:** Please refer to Part 3 of your Term Grazing Permit. Allotment boundary fences should be maintained prior to cattle entering the allotment, interior fences should also be maintained prior to cattle entering a new unit. Existing improvements should be maintained each year before requesting new improvements. The Bear Creek-Cherry Creek fence maintenance will be shared by permittees from both allotments. The Cherry Creek and Antelope permittees will determine the midpoint of the fence. Cherry Creek will maintain the east half and Antelope will maintain the west half.

The Smiley Meadow let down fence should be maintained in a way that allows it to be let down upon cattle leaving the pasture. This fence should be put up one week prior to livestock entering the unit and let down within two weeks of livestock leaving the Smiley Meadow unit. The permittees improved the design of the letdown fence in 2014 so that it functions as a letdown fence. Prior to turn out you are authorized two trips in and out of Smiley Meadows with ATV's/UTV's to maintain the fences.

The three troughs in Dry Canyon need repaired to standard before entering the allotment in 2015. The Forest will provide new troughs if the existing troughs are not repairable. Permittees and the Forest Service agreed that the Forest would provide a 14 foot fiberglass trough to replace the leaking trough in

lower Dry Canyon. The fence around the rider's camp horse pasture should be maintained, even in years when not being used. This fence needs repaired before going on the allotment in 2015.

The water trough in the eastern portion of the Burnt Hollow Unit may need the headbox reset as the water was in the headbox, but not reaching the outlet pipe.

**Weed Free Hay:** In accordance with State Law, please ensure that range riders bring hay that is certified and tagged noxious weed free.

**Response to Predators:** Should predator issues arise on the allotment, please contact your range management specialist and Idaho Fish & Game or Wildlife Services with the information. Coordination with permittees and all agencies listed above is important to assess predator issues and share information on predator management decisions on National Forest lands and those areas adjacent to National Forest.

**Grazing Fees:** The grazing fees for the 2015 season are \$1.69/head month. Your grazing fee payment will need to be received prior to turning livestock out on the National Forest. Receipt of payment could take up to 2 weeks from the date payment is sent.

**Actual Use Report:** An Actual Use Report will be mailed to you upon completion of the grazing season. This form is to be completed and returned to the Lost River Ranger District in a timely manner. The association President will need to provide a consolidated report with the numbers and dates when cattle entered the allotment, moved from unit to unit, and when cattle were removed from the allotment. Each permittee will need to provide an individual report with dates when their cattle entered and left the allotment. This information is used for the purpose of evaluating and analyzing: grazing allotment and grazing unit use, compliance with annual operating instructions/ term grazing permits, and planning next season's grazing management strategy.

Applications for refunds/credits for unused portions of your allotment must be requested and filed separately. Please contact our office if you need an application for refund/credit.

**NEPA and Allotment Management Plans (AMP):** Our office is in the process of completing an environmental analysis and documentation for livestock grazing in the Antelope Allotment and four others in the Antelope Creek drainage. Permittees will need to work closely with your rangeland management specialist and other Forest personnel to develop a proposed action for grazing management in conjunction with a long term grazing management strategy (AMP) for your allotment.

This work will include taking a hard look at historic and existing grazing activities to determine whether current management is adequate to comply with the Forest Plan and other laws and regulations that govern the management of public lands. This process will include several meetings with permittees to discuss and agree on feasible and appropriate management goals and monitoring objectives on the allotment that will meet or move us toward the desired conditions for multiple resources on the allotment. The ultimate goal of this analysis is to determine the existing condition and trend of those areas most likely to be affected by livestock grazing and develop a plan to minimize impacts through best management practices for livestock grazing. Your participation in development of the proposed action and AMP are crucial to the success of your operation and our long term management of the area.

Questions regarding these instructions should be directed to Diane Weaver or the District Rangeland Management Specialist at 588-3400.